

OUR WORK;  
OR  
THE AIM OF THE GOSPEL MINISTER.



A SERMON PREACHED NOVEMBER 10, 1878, ON THE COMPLETION  
OF THE TENTH YEAR OF HIS PASTORATE,

BY

REV. SAMUEL W. REIGART,

IN THE

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF MECHANICSBURG, PENNSYLVANIA.

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PUBLISHED AT THE REQUEST OF THE CONGREGATION.

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TEXT: COLOSSIANS I, 28:—*Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.*

In the context, we have a magnificent description of the exalted dignity of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is characterized by the Apostle as "the image of the invisible God, the first born of every creature. By Him," we are told, "were all things created that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities,

or powers; all things were created by Him, and for Him; and He is before all things, and by Him all things consist, and He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the first born from the dead; that in all things He might have the pre-eminence."

Then follows a statement of what this exalted Saviour has done in the work of redemption, in making peace by the blood of the cross, and reconciling the world to God. Through this gospel, Paul says, they, the Colossian Christians, to whom this letter is addressed, had been reconciled to God, and were now brought into a state in which they might be presented as "holy and unblamable" in His sight. Of this gospel, Paul says he was a minister; in preaching it he had been called to endure trials, but these trials he endured with joy, esteeming it a high honor and an exalted privilege to make known among men "the riches of the glory of the mystery," for ages hidden from the world, but now made manifest to His saints, which is "Christ in you, the hope of glory, whom," says he, "we preach; warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus."

The subject presented to us in these words is the Object of the Pastoral Office, or the Work of the Christian Preacher, and this the text sets forth under three heads; giving us—

First. The matter or theme of Christian preaching, viz: *Christ*, "whom we preach."

Secondly. The manner or method of Christian preaching, viz: *by personal admonition and instruction*, "warning every man and teaching every man, in all wisdom," and,

Thirdly. The design or end of Christian preaching, viz: *maturity of Christian life*—"that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus."

Let us consider—

## I.

The matter or theme of Christian preaching. This is Christ, for the antecedent to "whom" is Christ, in the verse preceding the text. "Christ in (or among) you the hope of

glory," is the theme of our preaching. Elsewhere Paul says, "we preach Christ crucified." And again, "we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord." And again, still more emphatically, in his first epistle to the Corinthians (ii. chap., 2d v.), "I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and Him crucified."

The word translated "preach" in our text means literally "to bring word down to any one," that is, to bring it home to him, hence: to announce, to publish, to show forth. To "preach Christ," then, is to set forth to men Christ, in all his offices, as the Saviour of mankind; to point men, as John the Baptist pointed men, to Jesus, as "the Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world." To preach Christ is to set forth the character and work of the Lord Jesus, His divinity and humanity, His headship and kingly authority, His doctrines and precepts, His sacrifice and intercession, the facts of His life and His death, and the grand object accomplished by His coming into the world. To preach Christ is to preach the gospel, to unfold to men all those principles which cluster around the cross; the lost, ruined, helpless condition of man as a sinner; the provision which the grace of God has made for his recovery through the atonement of His son; the regenerating and sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit, and the promises of good, as well as threatenings of evil, which have been sealed in atoning blood. The preacher of the gospel has his work definitely laid out for him; his message is put into his lips; he is charged with no uncertain commission. He is not a mere lecturer on morals; he is not an exponent of philosophy; he is not a teacher of science; he is not a political reformer, nor is it his province to meddle into questions of mere state polity. His is a higher office than that of the statesman, philosopher, or social reformer. He is the ambassador of Christ, the representative of the King of kings, charged with the commission of offering pardon to men on condition of their acceptance of God's grace through Christ; entrusted with the office of presenting to the minds and hearts of men the excellency of the

life of the Lord Jesus and the sufficiency of His death as a sacrifice for sins, in such a way as to lead men to trust in Him, to follow Him, to obey Him; to accept Him as their Prophet, Priest and King to their own salvation and the praise and glory of God. Such was the aim of the first preachers of the gospel. Wherever they went, they carried with them the same message; and whether their hearers were Jews or Gentiles, rich or poor, learned or unlearned, the common people or philosophers, one message answered for all: "Repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ." If they wished to convince men of sin, they pointed to Christ; if to bind up the broken heart, or give peace to the troubled conscience, they pointed to the same atoning sacrifice. Every doctrine, exhortation and appeal had reference to "the Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world." The Apostles preached not in enticing words of men's wisdom, nor affected the style of the philosophers of their days, nor resorted to sensational themes or methods, knowing that the truth of God needs not aid from a human source, and that it is itself the only source of cure for all the evils of sin.

We, my brethren, live in a different age of the world, but the same gospel is still efficacious in lifting man up from his degradation, in overcoming the evil passions of the soul, in fitting us for heaven—and the object of our preaching must be the same as that of the primitive disciples, "Christ and Him crucified." We have the same Providence to guide us, the same Divine Spirit to enlighten and quicken us, and the same glorious promise to sustain us: "Lo! I am with you always, even unto the end of the world!"

## II.

But we have in the text not only the matter of Christian preaching, "Christ," but the *manner* in which Christ is to be preached: "warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom." Here two things are specified as belonging to the preacher's work, warning and teaching. He is to admonish men and to instruct them. The difference between the two



words here employed is simply this: warning is connected with repentance, it refers to a man's conduct, and is addressed primarily to the conscience and the heart. Teaching is connected rather with faith, it refers to a man's creed, and is addressed primarily to the intellect. The preacher of the gospel then, in the performance of his duties, must preach Christ in such a way as to move the hearts and arouse the consciences of men, and to inform their minds.

Men are sinful. They are in a state of enmity to God, and therefore in a state of awful danger, exposed to the wrath and curse of an all-powerful and all-righteous Sovereign. They are under the condemnation of the divine law. They need to be warned of their danger; to be admonished of their guilt; to be blamed for their sins. Appeal, exhortation, entreaty, must be employed to arouse sinners to a sense of their true condition—to stir their hearts, to alarm their consciences, to lead them to forsake their sins and flee to the hope set before them in the gospel. So Peter preached, charging home upon the crucifiers of the Lord their sins, until they were forced to cry out, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" So Paul preached, reproving Felix for his crimes, until the impious ruler trembled, and hastily dismissed the ambassador of God. Thus the same Apostle fulfilled his mission at Ephesus, for, looking back to his residence there, he could say, "By the space of three years, I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears." So our blessed Saviour preached, urging men to repentance and warning them against the danger of falling into the hands of that God who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Thus Paul charges his beloved Timothy, "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long suffering and doctrine." Brethren, we must be faithful in our preaching. We are not sent to "prophecy smooth things," nor to "sew pillows for all arm-holes."

The native depravity of man and the cunning of Satan conspire to lull men's souls into security. Our work is not to exalt the human reason, to preach the nobility of human nature,

to justify men to God, nor to "take sides with rebels against their Maker." We must take sides with God against all his enemies. We must set forth the "exceeding sinfulness of sin." We must show the impenitent the peril of continuing to rebel against the Almighty. In this we have no option. We dare not tone down the truths of the Bible to please the popular ear. We dare not yield to the wicked prejudices, errors and clamors of the world. We dare not "trim our sails to catch the breath of popular applause." We must make full and open war on all unrighteousness—set forth in all their dread solemnity the sanctions of God's most holy law, and give men full and timely warning of the consequences of their sins, that they may be led to forsake them, and turn to the Lord Jesus Christ.

But warning is only one part of the preacher's duty. He is likewise to instruct, to teach, to *indoctrinate* men. Exhortation and warning are of little use where there is not sound instruction and a careful inculcation of the truth. "Go ye and *teach* all nations," is the language of Christ's commission to his Disciples. And Paul's direction to Timothy was, "The things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also." The world is full of error respecting religious things. Much ignorance prevails respecting the character of God, and man's relation to Him. It is by the truth alone that the evil effects of ignorance and error are to be counteracted, the world enlightened, and the church built up. There is in these days, in some quarters, a great hue and cry raised against "doctrinal preaching." The inculcation of doctrine is stigmatized as dull and unprofitable, as "offering the mere dry bones to souls craving the nutritive milk and meat of the word." We do not deny that there may be doctrinal preaching that is dry and uninteresting. We do not think that sermons should be theological lectures, didactic or polemic. And yet even such sermons would be a great deal more profitable than the sensational preaching so much in vogue. Doctrine should always be developed in its practical and experimental bearings, but doctrine there must be.



“The attempt to edify the church without doctrinal instruction,” says Dr. Atwater, “is like the attempt to build a house without foundation or frame-work. Let any one call the doctrines ‘bones’ if they will. What sort of a body would that be which was flesh and blood without any bones?” The effect of the failure to preach vigorously and fully the grand doctrines of the Bible to the refuting of error, is seen in the case of the church of the amiable John Newton. With all his excellencies, that good man shrank from opposing errors. His people were unwarned against the craftiness of false teachers, and their venerable pastor, as Dr. Plumer relates in his “Pastoral Theology,” “was hardly laid in his grave till his flock were scattered, some of them falling among grievous wolves.” The truth need not be taught in a controversial spirit, but still it must be taught. Say what you please about “creeds,” a creed every Christian must have, and it is the business of the preacher so to furnish the minds of his people with scriptural knowledge that each one may have a clear conception of God and His relation to man; of Christ and His work, of the Holy Spirit and His office. As a general thing, you will find it to be the case, that the Christian who has the best defined creed, that is, the clearest notions of the Truth, is the most useful in the church and in the world. But this work of warning and teaching men must be a *personal* work. Men are not merely to be appealed to and instructed in the mass, but individually: “warning every man and teaching every man,” says Paul, that is, bringing the gospel home to every man’s heart and conscience, and suiting our teaching to every man’s case. And this must be done as Paul did it, “in all wisdom.” Some refer this expression to the manner of Paul’s preaching, and then it means “in the wisest way, choosing the fittest seasons, using the wisest means, and adapting oneself to the difficulties, circumstances and capacities of those with whom we have to do.” Others refer the clause to the knowledge communicated to those taught, and then it would mean, “keeping back nothing, but instructing all in the perfect knowledge of the mysteries of faith, which is the true

wisdom." What if we include both meanings? We are to declare the whole counsel of God, and to suit our preaching to the wants, capacities and circumstances of those to whom we are sent.

### III.

But, thirdly, the text sets before us the great end to be accomplished by our preaching, and that is, *maturity of Christian life*, "that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus." The design of the ministry is not merely, as some suppose, the conversion of men, but their spiritual culture, the training of men for usefulness in this life, and for blessedness in the life to come. Our work is not simply to make men Christians, but to make them intelligent, strong, useful, devoted, mature Christians. Our work would not be at an end, were the whole world converted to God. We would still find constant and delightful employment in leading God's children into the deeper mysteries of His knowledge, and to higher attainments in the divine life. Paul's epistles are addressed not to unconverted but to converted men, and the most of Christian preaching is for the edification of the Church, not the conversion of sinners. The conversion of sinners must be constantly kept before us as a grand object of our preaching; but conversion, or to speak more correctly, regeneration, is but the beginning of the Christian life, and this life, feeble at first, must be nourished and strengthened and developed by the milk and the meat of the Divine Word, administered in the preaching of that Word, that the Church may fulfill her grand mission in the world. To "feed the sheep," or to "shepherd" them, as the word may be rendered in our language, is every whit as important as to gather them into the fold. Our work is not merely to bring men into the Church, but to fit them for Christ's Heavenly Kingdom; not merely to enclose souls in the gospel net, but to bring the souls enclosed therein safely to the Eternal Shore. "That we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus." is the aim of every gospel minister; that our

hearers may be so thoroughly instructed in their duties to the Lord Jesus Christ and His Church; so fully made partakers of His grace; so thoroughly assimilated to Him, that nothing may be wanting in their Christian character; that when we come to stand before the judgment throne not one of those to whom we have ministered may be found without the wedding garment; not one unfurnished for the Heavenly banquet; not one unfitted for the society of angels and the spirits of just men made perfect; not one unprepared to stand in the presence of God.

This, brethren, is the great end and design of the pastoral office, and a nobler, more important, more responsible work cannot be conceived. Your pastor knows how imperfectly he has fulfilled it; but the principles laid down in the text he has endeavored to keep before him in all his efforts in the midst of you. And now, contemplating this day the completion of ten years of pastoral work in this congregation, two emotions contend for the mastery in my mind—an emotion of joy, that I have been permitted in the good providence of God to labor for so many years among you; and a feeling of sorrow that I have accomplished so little for Him. I am profoundly grateful to God for the uninterrupted harmony which has marked the pastoral relation all these years, for the steady growth of this Church and congregation, for the prevalence in the midst of you of a spirit of brotherly love, of prayer and of zeal for God's glory, and for all the tokens of God's goodness to us as a Church. I am deeply humbled in view of my own short-comings; the mistakes and failures I have made in the discharge of the duties of that office, the contemplation of which filled even an Apostle's mind with dismay, and led him to exclaim, "Who is sufficient for these things?" Not, then, as a matter of boasting, but of interest to you, let me briefly sum up my labors in connection with this Church for the past ten years, acknowledging at the same time my indebtedness to my co-workers in the Session and in the Church, especially to "those women who labored with me

in the gospel," by whose efforts and prayers my hands have been upheld.

During my ministry in this place I have preached 1,270 sermons, and delivered 700 lectures and addresses; baptized 83 infants and 51 adults,\* and admitted to the communion of the Church 201 persons—upon examination and profession of faith, 135; by certificate, 66. The number of members on the roll of this Church ten years ago was 103; the present membership is 195. During my pastorate we have lost from our number by death, 20 members; by removal from town and dismission to other churches, 83. The Session has suspended from communion 6. I have officiated at 145 funerals, and united in marriage 73 couples. The Church has lost by death two of its Elders: Dr. James B. Herring, who departed this life November 9, 1871, and Jacob B. Hurst, whom God called home November 18, 1875.

Six Elders have been ordained and installed: January 1, 1871, Milton C. Stayman was ordained to the office of ruling Elder, and installed over the Church, together with Jacob B. Hurst, formerly an Elder in the Church of Dillsburg, and James Ralston, formerly an Elder in the First Church of Carlisle.

November 21, 1872, Christian B. Neisley and Robert Mateer were ordained to the office of ruling Elder, and at the same time Robert A. Bucher was installed, having been an Elder in the Church of Silvers' Spring.

The amount contributed by the Church during the past ten years for missionary purposes, including the various Boards of the Church, is \$3,600; to repair and refurnish the Church, and pay off a small debt, \$1,650—making a total of \$5,250 beyond and above the current expenses of the Church.

Such, brethren, is a brief summary of the work and the benevolent contributions of the Church during the term of my pastorate among you. If we have made any progress as a Church, let us "thank God and take courage." Let us endeavor to realize our responsibility to God for the talents and

privileges he has conferred upon us, and let us individually consecrate ourselves anew to His service, resolved from this day forth to labor more earnestly for the advancement of His Kingdom in the world, that our growth as a Church may be more rapid in the future than in the past, and that we may be more "faithful in every good work."

As for myself, the principles which have guided me in the past shall direct me in the time to come. I have not sought to deliver to you any other message than that with which God's ministers have all along been charged, nor do I expect in the future to appear before you with any other message than the "old, old story" of the cross. I have spoken from this pulpit nothing that I did not believe in my inmost soul to be the truth of God. Never has the shadow of a doubt crossed my mind regarding those grand doctrines of grace, that I have endeavored to unfold to you. A sinner saved by grace, I have felt in my own heart the preciousness of that salvation I have sought to commend to you. Conscious of my own weakness, I have yet, in dependence upon divine aid, "not shunned to declare unto you the whole counsel of God. Actuated, if I know my own heart, by no merely selfish or personal considerations, I have spoken out plainly on all subjects pertaining to Christian duty, and such shall be my purpose in the future, so long as God permits me to exercise my ministry among you. If I have preached plainly, I have only sought your good, only desired to make you "perfect in every good work;" and such shall be my object in the time to come.

What changes the next ten years shall bring to you, to me, to this Church, God only knows. One thing is certain. Before another decade has gone, at least a score of us shall have passed beyond this scene of action to the changeless realities of eternity. Who of us shall be among that number? In the prospect ten years appears a long period, but oh! in the retrospect how short! Oh! my brethren, let us remember that "*the time is short.*" Let us so live, so improve our opportunities, so employ the means of grace, so discharge the duties



which we owe to God, to His Church, to one another, to all around us, that on the last Great Day, when before the Judgment Throne we shall all stand, to "receive the things done in the body," I may "present every one of you perfect in Christ Jesus," and so together we shall sit down in the Kingdom of God, and amid the blissful scenes of heaven, recall with delight the Christian intercourse of earth.

"For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth and length, and depth and height, and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might *be filled with all the fullness of God!*"





## APPENDIX.

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The Presbyterian Church of Mechanicsburg was organized by a committee of the Presbytery of Carlisle, October 6, 1860, with a membership of 48, all but two being members of the Church of Silvers' Spring. The following were elected ruling Elders: Dr. James B. Herring, William Y. Johnson, David L. Clark, William Eckels, James Graham, and Dr. Robert G. Young, the latter an elder in the Church of Silvers' Spring.

The first pastor was the Rev. George W. Chalfant, who was installed May 5, 1861. After laboring successfully in this field for two years, part of which time, by consent of the congregation, he acted as Chaplain in the Union army, Mr. Chalfant resigned his pastorate, March 30, 1863. He was succeeded by Rev. Boyd M. Kerr, whose ministry lasted three and a half years, and was terminated by his resignation, April 15, 1868.

The present pastor, Rev. Samuel W. Reigart (called from the Church of Sunbury, Pa.), entered upon his pastoral duties October 25, 1868, although, at his own request, his formal installation by the Presbytery was deferred until June 15, 1869.

The present Session consists of the following Elders: Dr. Robert G. Young, clerk; William Eckels, David L. Clark, James Graham, James Ralston, Christian B. Niesley, Milton C Stayman, and Robert A. Bucher.





